

VZCZCXRO8330
RR RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHHI #0535/01 1290944
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 080944Z MAY 08
FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7764
INFO RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH 4679
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7110
RUEHXS/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 000535

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [KCOR](#) [KPAO](#) [SOCI](#) [PREL](#) [CM](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR EXCHANGES VIEWS ON HUMAN RIGHTS, CHINA WITH
CHAIRMAN OF THE PARTY EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMISSION

HANOI 00000535 001.2 OF 002

Summary

¶1. (SBU) On May 2, CPV External Relations Commission (ERC) Chairman Tran Van Hang told the Ambassador the ERC welcomes the positive developments in U.S.-Vietnam relations, especially in trade, investment and education. He appealed for Vietnam to be granted GSP and agreed that many recently opened banks do not have the capacity to make sound lending and investment decisions. In response to the Ambassador's review of the U.S. approach on human rights, the Chairman said the GVN's goal is to make Vietnam a "strong and advanced society." He rejected the notion of objective universal rights. In studying the Chinese model for political change, Hang said Hanoi does "not adopt everything Beijing does." In a now familiar refrain, the Chairman appealed for help in getting an American university to open a branch in Vietnam. End Summary.

Economic Relations as Foundation

¶2. (SBU) In his May 2 meeting with the Ambassador, Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) External Relations Commission (ERC) Chairman Tran Van Hang said that the ERC welcomes the positive trajectory in U.S.-Vietnam relations, especially in the areas of trade, investment and education. American companies have invested heavily in Vietnam in the first five months of 2008 and the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement has helped deepen economic ties between the two countries, Hang declared. Hang appealed for the USG to grant Vietnam entry into the General System of Preferences (GSP).

¶3. (SBU) The Ambassador responded that interest in Vietnam among the investment community is high and the USG hopes to commence Bilateral Investment Treaty negotiations soon. He added that on GSP we have work to do, and that we are exploring ways to make progress on this and Vietnam's market economy status during the PM's planned visit to Washington. On the question of Vietnam's State-Owned-Enterprises (SOE) moving into non-core business areas, the Chairman said Hanoi is determined to advance the SOE equitization process. The GVN aims to make SOEs more competitive so they can attract foreign partners, he said. Hang agreed with the Ambassador that too many banks have opened over the past year and that many of these banks do not have the capacity to make good lending and investment decisions in Vietnam's fast-changing economy.

Different Perspectives on Human Rights

¶4. (SBU) The GVN's ultimate goal is to make Vietnam a "strong and advanced society," the Chairman stated. He rejected the notion of "objective universal values;" a country's values are reflected in its own traditions and cultures, Hang declared. The GVN and USG are exchanging views in bilateral and multilateral forums, but problems

and different perceptions are unavoidable, he said. The important thing for U.S.-Vietnam relations is that "we are talking about our differences," Hang said.

15. (SBU) The Ambassador underscored the U.S. position on the importance of adherence to internationally recognized standards of human rights, noting that the USG and Vietnam will be holding discussions during the upcoming Human Rights Dialogue in Hanoi. He suggested that Hanoi allow foreign news organizations to open offices in Ho Chi Minh City, a step that would not only be good for media freedom in Vietnam, but would help the world media report the positive economic news coming out of Vietnam as well.

Part-to-Party Connections with China

16. (SBU) In response to the Ambassador's query on CPV exchanges with China's Communist Party, given recent bumps in the road over the South China Sea, Hang said Hanoi and Beijing have a long tradition of Party-to-Party contacts and the two sides have agreed to step up their exchanges at the national and provincial levels to "increase knowledge and understanding." Both countries are "opening their doors," although China has had more experience in this regard than Vietnam. The overwhelming majority of the people in both countries live in rural areas and work in agriculture, the Chairman explained.

However, when studying the Chinese model for political change, Hanoi does "not adopt everything Beijing does," Hang declared. On other possible models for managing political change, Hang said Hanoi "is following its own path." As for the South China Sea issue, it is "very complicated because it involves many countries" and some countries "have their own reasons" for not acting in line with the ASEAN-China Code of Conduct, Hang said.

Social Issues

HANOI 00000535 002.2 OF 002

17. (SBU) The poor overall quality of human resources in Vietnam is of great concern to the Party and it hopes to send more students to the United States for short- and long-term training, Hang stated. In line with what other GVN interlocutors have told the Ambassador, the Chairman appealed for help in getting an American university to open a branch in Vietnam. "The quality of Vietnamese education is low while the quality of American universities is high," the Chairman added. The Ambassador replied that one of his main goals is to increase educational links between the two countries and that the USG hopes to have something to say about increased educational cooperation during the Prime Minister's planned visit to Washington.

18. (SBU) The Chairman said he hopes the USG will do more to help disadvantaged groups in society, including those who are "suffering from the effects of Agent Orange." The Ambassador emphasized that the USG already is carrying out environmental remediation work in Central Vietnam and may come up with a technical assistance package to help the GVN fight global warming.

Comment: Still Settling Into New Role

19. (SBU) At one point during the hour-long meeting, Hang admitted that he feels more comfortable working on social and economic issues rather than international relations. He worked on these issues for over twenty years, before the Party plucked him in 2007 to lead the ERC. As a relatively new Chairman, he is getting a baptism by fire; he has traveled several times to China to discuss Party-to-Party ties. More regular interactions between the Ambassador and Hang, which the latter agreed to at this initial meeting, will give us greater insight into Party thinking on Vietnam's foreign relations. End Comment.

Biographic Notes

110. (SBU) Tran Van Hang has served as ERC Chairman since August

12007. He concurrently serves as a deputy in the National Assembly. From January to August 2007, he was deputy head of the ERC. He joined the CPV's 160-member Central Committee (CC) at the 10th Party Congress in 2006. From 2003 to 2006, Hang held senior Party positions in Soc Trang Province, in the Mekong Delta. He was Vice Minister at the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs in 2003 and, from 1993 to 2003, he worked on international labor issues at the Office of International Labor Cooperation. Hang has a PhD in Economics from Vietnam's National Institute of Economics and studied economics in the former Soviet Union from 1973 to 1978. He also studied at the CPV-run Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy. Born in 1953 in Nghe An Province, the same province that produced Ho Chi Minh, Hang has one daughter and one son.

MICHALAK